

Amend Revenue and Taxation Code Sections 69 and 69.3 to treat land and improvements as separate units in meeting the "substantially damaged or destroyed" threshold of 50% for purposes of qualifying for disaster relief via a base year value transfer.

Source: Senate Bill 1777, 2008 (Property and Special Taxes Department)

Existing Law

California property tax law provides for various situations in which the base year value of a property can be transferred to another property, notwithstanding that the property has changed ownership. These special situations are provided pursuant to various constitutional amendments and serve to avoid the otherwise required reassessment of a property to its current market value when it changes ownership. Related to this bill, base year value transfers are available to disaster victims that choose to relocate and purchase a new property rather than rebuild on the same site.

Permitting a person to "transfer" his or her base year value from one property to another property provides that person with tax relief by allowing the property owner to continue to pay taxes on the replacement property equivalent to that paid on the property from which they were displaced. Without a base year value transfer, the taxes on the new property would likely be significantly more because under the general change in ownership laws the taxes would be based on the new property's current fair market value. The rationale for providing a base year value transfer is that the tax laws should not further afflict disaster victims by imposing upon them higher property taxes. If the disaster had not occurred, those individuals would not have been compelled to relocate and thereby forfeit their Proposition 13 protected base year values.

Specifically, Revenue and Taxation Code Section 69 provides that persons who own property substantially damaged or destroyed in a governor-declared disaster may transfer the base year value of that property to a property acquired or constructed as a replacement if it is acquired within five years after the disaster. "Substantially damaged" means physical damage amounting to more than 50 percent of its current market value immediately prior to the disaster.

Base year value transfers are available for all property types with the limitation that the original property and the replacement property must be of the same property *type*: residential, commercial, agricultural, or industrial. The replacement property is "comparable" if it is similar in size, utility, and function to the destroyed property, and if the market value of the acquired property does not exceed 120% of the fair market value of the replaced property in its pre-damaged condition. Property owners may still, nevertheless, receive the disaster relief in cases where the value of the replacement property exceeds the 120% limitation. In such cases, the amount over this threshold is assessed at full market value and added to the transferred base year value. (Proposition 50 of 1986 authorized this base year value transfer provision.)

Section 69.3 provides similar disaster base year value transfer provisions but, unlike Section 69 which applies to all property types, it is limited to principal places of residences purchased in another county and only applies to homes purchased in counties where the board of supervisors has adopted an ordinance making this benefit available. Currently, only eight counties extend this relief to displaced homeowners who previously lived in another county: Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Modoc, San Francisco, Santa Clara, Solano, Sutter and Ventura. (Proposition 171 in 1995 authorized this base year value transfer provision.)

This Proposal

This proposal amends Sections 69 and 69.3 to treat land and improvements as separate units in meeting the "substantially damaged or destroyed" threshold of 50% for purposes of qualifying for disaster relief via a base year value transfer. This proposal would ensure that for those disaster victims that ultimately decide to relocate rather than rebuild a base year value transfer will be available to them in those locations where land values comprised more than 50% of the property's value.

This proposal addresses cases in which the scarcity of land in some locations has driven up land values to the point that land comprises more than 50% of a property's total value. For example, assume a home that is worth \$800,000 is completely destroyed in a wildfire. If the now empty lot is worth \$450,000 – i.e., more than 50% of the total value, the homeowner would not be eligible for a base year value transfer even though the home itself (the improvement) was 100% destroyed and the homeowner purchases a replacement dwelling that is no more than \$800,000. In this scenario, if the home's Proposition 13 protected base year value was \$350,000 and a replacement home is purchased at \$800,000 then without a base year value transfer, property taxes would increase from \$3,500 (\$350,000 x 1%) to \$8,000 (\$800,000 x 1%). The issue of land values comprising more than 50% of a property's total value is an emerging issue that recently came to light as a result of the 2007 fires in San Diego County.

Sections 51(b) and 170(b) and Rule 461(e) treat land and improvements as separate appraisal units for calamity purposes. Using these provisions of law as a guide, Sections 69 and 69.3 should be similarly amended to provide that for purposes of measuring the 50 percent loss in value, land and improvements should be considered as separate appraisal units. For purposes of comparing values of the original and replacement properties' values, within the 120% value limitation, land and improvements would continue to be considered as one appraisal unit.

Section 69 of the Revenue and Taxation Code is amended to read:

69. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, pursuant to Section 2 of Article XIII A of the Constitution, the base year value of property which is substantially damaged or destroyed by a disaster, as declared by the Governor, may be transferred to comparable property within the same

county which is acquired or newly constructed within five years after the disaster, or five years in the case of the Northridge earthquake, as a replacement for the substantially damaged or destroyed property. At the time the base year value of the substantially damaged or destroyed property is transferred to the replacement property, the substantially damaged or destroyed property shall be reassessed at its full cash value; however, the substantially damaged or destroyed property shall retain its base year value notwithstanding the transfer authorized by this section. If the owner or owners of substantially damaged or destroyed property receive property tax relief under this section, that property shall not be eligible for property tax relief under subdivision (c) of Section 70 in the event of its reconstruction.

(b) The replacement base year value of the replacement property acquired shall be determined in accordance with this section. The assessor shall use the following procedure in determining the appropriate replacement base year value of comparable replacement property:

(1) If the full cash value of the comparable replacement property does not exceed 120 percent of the full cash value of the property substantially damaged or destroyed, then the adjusted base year value of the property substantially damaged or destroyed shall be transferred to the comparable replacement property as its replacement base year value.

(2) If the full cash value of the replacement property exceeds 120 percent of the full cash value of the property substantially damaged or destroyed, then the amount of the full cash value over 120 percent of the full cash value of the property substantially damaged or destroyed shall be added to the adjusted base year value of the property substantially damaged or destroyed. The sum of these amounts shall become the replacement property's replacement base year value.

(3) If the full cash value of the comparable replacement property is less than the adjusted base year value of the property substantially damaged or destroyed, then that lower value shall become the replacement property's base year value.

(4) The full cash value of the property substantially damaged or destroyed shall be the amount of its full cash value immediately prior to its substantial damage or destruction, as determined by the county assessor of the county in which the property is located.

(c) For purposes of this section:

(1) Property is substantially damaged or destroyed if ~~it sustains~~ the land or the improvements sustain physical damage amounting to more than 50 percent of its full cash value immediately prior to the disaster. Damage includes a diminution in the value of property as a result of restricted access to the property where the restricted access was caused by the disaster and is permanent in nature.

(2) Replacement property is comparable to the property substantially damaged or destroyed if it is similar in size, utility, and function to the property which it replaces.

(A) Property is similar in function if the replacement property is subject to similar governmental restrictions, such as zoning.

(B) Both the size and utility of property are interrelated and associated with value. Property is similar in size and utility only to the extent that the replacement property is, or is intended to be, used in the same manner as the property substantially damaged or destroyed and its full cash value does not exceed 120 percent of the full cash value of the property substantially damaged or destroyed.

(i) A replacement property or any portion thereof used or intended to be used for a purpose substantially different than the use made of the property substantially damaged or destroyed shall to the extent of the dissimilar use be considered not similar in utility.

(ii) A replacement property or portion thereof that satisfies the use requirement but has a full cash value that exceeds 120 percent of the full cash value of the property substantially damaged or destroyed shall be considered, to the extent of the excess, not similar in utility and size.

(C) To the extent that replacement property, or any portion thereof, is not similar in function, size, and utility, the property, or portion thereof, shall be considered to have undergone a change in ownership when the replacement property is acquired or newly constructed.

(3) "Disaster" means a major misfortune or calamity in an area subsequently proclaimed by the Governor to be in a state of disaster as a result of the misfortune or calamity.

(d) (1) This section applies to any comparable replacement property acquired or newly constructed on or after July 1, 1985.

(2) The amendments made by Chapter 1053 of the Statutes of 1993 apply to any comparable replacement property that is acquired or newly constructed as a replacement for property substantially damaged or destroyed by a disaster occurring on or after October 20, 1991, and to the determination of base year values for the 1991–92 fiscal year and fiscal years thereafter.

(3) The amendments made by the act adding this paragraph apply to any comparable replacement property that is acquired or newly constructed as a replacement for property substantially damaged or destroyed by a disaster occurring on or after July 1, 2003, and to the determination of base year values for the 2003–04 fiscal year and fiscal years thereafter.

(e) Only the owner or owners of the property substantially damaged or destroyed, whether one or more individuals, partnerships, corporations, other legal entities, or a combination thereof, shall receive property tax relief under this section. Relief under this section shall be granted to an owner or owners of substantially damaged or destroyed property obtaining

title to replacement property. The acquisition of an ownership interest in a legal entity which, directly or indirectly, owns real property is not an acquisition of comparable property.

Section 69.3 of the Revenue and Taxation Code is amended to read:

69.3. (a) (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, pursuant to the authority of paragraph (3) of subdivision (e) of Section 2 of Article XIII A of the California Constitution, a county board of supervisors, after consultation with affected local agencies located within the boundaries of the county, may adopt an ordinance that authorizes the transfer, subject to the conditions and limitations of this section, of the base year value of real property that is located within another county in this state and has been substantially damaged or destroyed by a disaster to comparable replacement property, including land, of equal or lesser value that is located within the adopting county and has been acquired or newly constructed as a replacement for the damaged or destroyed property within three years after the damage or destruction of the original property.

(2) The base year value of the original property shall be the base year value of the original property as determined in accordance with Section 110.1, with the inflation factor adjustments permitted by subdivision (f) of Section 110.1, determined as of the date immediately prior to the date that the original property was substantially damaged or destroyed. The base year value of the original property shall also include any inflation factor adjustments permitted by subdivision (f) of Section 110.1 for the period subsequent to the date of the substantial damage to, or destruction of, the original property and up to the date the replacement property is acquired or newly constructed, regardless of whether the claimant continued to own the original property during this entire period. The base year or years used to compute the base year value of the original property shall be deemed to be the base year or years of any property to which that base year value is transferred pursuant to this section.

(b) For purposes of this section:

(1) "Affected local agency" means any city, special district, school district, or community college district that receives an annual allocation of ad valorem property tax revenues.

(2) "Claimant" means an owner or owners of real property claiming the property tax relief provided by this section.

(3) "Comparable replacement property" means a replacement property that has a full cash value of equal or lesser value as defined in paragraph (6).

(4) "Consultation" means a noticed hearing, that is conducted by a county board of supervisors concerning the adoption of an ordinance described in subdivision (a) and with respect to which all affected local agencies within the boundaries of the county are provided with reasonable

notice of the time and the place of the hearing and a reasonable opportunity to appear and participate.

(5) "Disaster" means a major misfortune or calamity in an area subsequently proclaimed by the Governor to be in a state of disaster as a result of the misfortune or calamity.

(6) "Equal or lesser value" means that the amount of the full cash value of the replacement property does not exceed one of the following:

(A) One hundred five percent of the amount of the full cash value of the original property if the replacement property is purchased or newly constructed within the first year following the date of the damage or destruction of the original property.

(B) One hundred ten percent of the amount of the full cash value of the original property if the replacement property is purchased or newly constructed within the second year following the date of the damage or destruction of the original property.

(C) One hundred fifteen percent of the amount of the full cash value of the original property if the replacement property is purchased or newly constructed within the third year following the date of the damage or destruction of the original property.

For the purposes of this paragraph, if the replacement property is, in part, purchased and, in part, newly constructed, the date the "replacement property is purchased or newly constructed" is the date of the purchase or the date of completion of new construction, whichever is later.

(7) "Full cash value of the original property" means its full cash value, as determined in accordance with Section 110, immediately prior to its substantial damage or destruction, as determined by the county assessor of the county in which the property is located.

(8) "Full cash value of the replacement property" means its full cash value, as determined in accordance with Section 110.1 as of the date upon which it was purchased or new construction was completed, that is applicable on and after that date.

(9) "Original property" means a building, structure, or other shelter constituting a place of abode, whether real property or personal property, that is owned and occupied by a claimant as his or her principal place of residence, and any land owned by the claimant on which the building, structure, or other shelter is situated, that has been substantially damaged or destroyed by a disaster. For purposes of this paragraph, land constituting a part of original property includes only that area of reasonable size that is used as a site for a residence, and "land owned by the claimant" includes land for which the claimant either holds a leasehold interest described in subdivision (c) of Section 61 or a land purchase contract. For purposes of this paragraph, each unit of a multiunit dwelling shall be considered a separate original property.

(10) "Owner or owners" means an individual or individuals, but does not include any firm, partnership, association, corporation, company, other legal entity or organization of any kind.

(11) "Replacement property" means a building, structure, or other shelter constituting a place of abode, whether real property or personal property, that is owned and occupied by a claimant as his or her principal place of residence, and any land owned by the claimant on which the building, structure, or other shelter is situated. For purposes of this paragraph, land constituting a part of the replacement property includes only that area of reasonable size that is used as the site for a residence, and "land owned by the claimant" includes land for which the claimant either holds a leasehold interest described in subdivision (c) of Section 61 or a land purchase contract. For purposes of this paragraph, each unit of a multiunit dwelling shall be considered a separate replacement property. "Replacement property" does not include any property,

including land or improvements, if the claimant owned any portion of that property prior to the date of the disaster that damaged or destroyed the original property.

(12) "Substantially damaged or destroyed" means property ~~that sustains~~ where either the land or the improvements sustain physical damage amounting to more than 50 percent of its full cash value immediately prior to the disaster. Damage includes a diminution in the value of property as a result of restricted access to the property where the restricted access was caused by the disaster and is permanent in nature.

(c) At the time the base year value of the substantially damaged or destroyed property is transferred to the replacement property pursuant to an ordinance adopted under this section, the substantially damaged or destroyed property shall be reassessed at its full cash value. However, the substantially damaged or destroyed property shall retain its base year value notwithstanding that transfer. If the owner or owners of substantially damaged or destroyed property receive property tax relief under this section, that property shall not be eligible for property tax relief under subdivision (c) of Section 70 in the event of its reconstruction.

(d) Only the owner or owners of the property that has been substantially damaged or destroyed may receive property tax relief under an ordinance adopted pursuant to this section. Relief under an ordinance adopted pursuant to this section shall be granted to an owner or owners of a substantially damaged or destroyed property obtaining comparable replacement property. The acquisition of an ownership interest in a legal entity that, directly or indirectly, owns real property is not an acquisition of comparable replacement property for purposes of this section.

(e) A timely claim for relief under an ordinance adopted pursuant to this section, in that form as shall be prescribed by the board, shall be filed by the owner with the assessor of the county in which the replacement property is located. No relief under an ordinance adopted pursuant to this

section shall be granted unless the claim is filed no later than January 1, 1996, or within three years after the replacement property is acquired or newly constructed, whichever is later.

(f) Any taxes that were levied on the replacement property prior to the filing of a claim on the basis of the replacement property's new base year value, and any allowable annual adjustments thereto, shall be canceled or refunded to the claimant to the extent that taxes exceed the amount that would be due when determined on the basis of the adjusted new base year value.

(g) This section shall apply to any comparable replacement property of equal or lesser value that is acquired or newly constructed as a replacement for property that has been substantially damaged or destroyed by a disaster occurring on or after October 20, 1991, and to the determination of base year values for the 1991–92 fiscal year and each fiscal year thereafter.